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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002351

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DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA
ENERGY FOR CAROLYN GAY

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SUBJECT: NEW SPEAKER'S REPUTATION INSTILLS HOPE FOR HOUSE

REF: ABUJA 2324

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Nigerians anticipate a more dynamic, purposeful and result-oriented leadership in the House of Representatives following the recent election of Dimeji Saburi Bankole as the Speaker. In public statements, the new Speaker promised Nigerians quality legislation that will impact directly on their lives. Bankole, described by friends and colleagues as "quiet, amiable, intelligent and pragmatic" is the fifth Speaker of the House since 1999, a member of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and a product of the Integrity Group which forced the exit of former Speaker Patricia Etteh over corruption charges. However, news reports surfaced that Bankole might have a scandal of his own to contend with. Unknown members of the House are alleging Bankole did not complete his mandatory time in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) which is required by law of all university graduates. Bankole, like most members of the Integrity Group, is from the wing of the PDP which opposes the continuing influence of former President Obasanjo. END SUMMARY.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

2. (SBU) Thirty-eight year-old Dimeji Bankole is from Abeokuta, Ogun State, former President Obasanjo's hometown in southwest Nigeria. Despite this, the relationship between the two families is not believed to be cordial. Recently married, the Speaker is the son of south-west politician Chief Alani Bankole, a well respected Yoruba leader. The elder Bankole became national Vice-Chairman of the All Peoples' Party (APP) and later acting National Chairman, a position he held until 2000 when he defected to the PDP. Alani Bankole's prestigious career and extensive network of contacts helped his son get elected to the House of Representatives in 2003.

EDUCATION

13. (SBU) Unlike previous Speakers who educational qualifications were sometimes questioned (particularly in the case of Etteh), the new Speaker is very well-educated. Bankole attended well-known private schools in Nigeria and London, earned a bachelors degree in Economics from the University of Reading, England in 1991. He also underwent military training in the UK, attending the Oxford Officer Training College, and receiving his Military Training Qualification in Strategic Studies in 1992 before beginning studies at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, where he completed the Royal Artillery Corps Short Service and Fast Track Officers' Courses. In 2005, Bankole also studied Public Finance Management at Harvard University.

EXPERIENCE

14. (SBU) Before entering politics in 2003, Bankole worked in family businesses as Director of Freight Agencies Nigeria Limited between 1995 and 1998; Executive Director Operations, West African Aluminium Products Limited from 1998 to 2003 and Director ASAP Limited from 2000 to 2003. With no previous government experience, Bankole was first elected to the House in 2003. Prior to his election as Speaker, he was Chairman of the House Committee on Land Transportation and a member of the Appropriations Committee.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

15. (SBU) In addition to business and politics, Bankole has been active in charity work, having established a

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non-governmental organization that focuses on health, poverty eradication, education and community development. The foundation is credited with renovating wards of the Oba Ademola Hospital, offering people free eye glasses, and embarking on an awareness campaign toward eradicating HIV/AIDS in Ogun and Kano States in conjunction with the Canadian Parliamentary Centre. The foundation has also been giving micro credit loans and awarding scholarships to thousands of students.

LEADERSHIP STYLE

16. (SBU) Sources close to Bankole told PolAssist the new Speaker is a dynamic leader who will carry everyone along in his decision-making process. The role of the Integrity Group that brought him to power and its influence over Bankole's decisions will be a critical indication of his independence. His first test will be what he does with the chairmanships and membership of the Parliamentary Committees constituted by his predecessor. In recent public statements, however, Bankole maintains he will not change committee assignments.

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

17. (SBU) Unknown members of the House are claiming that Bankole did not complete his mandatory time with the NYSC after graduating from University. Nigerian law states that all university graduates under the age of 30 are required to serve one year in the NYSC before beginning their careers. However, members of the Nigerian military and police are exempt from serving and Bankole's supporters believe his military training in the UK should exempt him from the NYSC requirement. If the claims that Bankole did not complete his NYSC service and did not receive an exemption for his military training prove true, he would be ineligible to serve in public office.

OBASANJO'S INFLUENCE WANING?

18. (C) COMMENT: Press analyses portray the emergence of Bankole as Speaker as trouble for former President Obasanjo's influence within the ruling PDP and the government. The Integrity Group has vowed to work with all "progressive elements" within the PDP to frustrate Obasanjo's plan to impose a chairman on the party at its December Convention. We will be following this question closely. END COMMENT.
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